

Tanaka announces resignation as undersheriff

GARDENA: Move to retire comes as he's re-elected mayor.

By Sandy Mazza Staff Writer

Just hours after he was re-elected mayor of Gardena, Paul Tanaka abruptly



TANAKA

ment.

announced his resignation Wednesday from his position as second-in-command of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

Tanaka, 54, said he will

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remain in the job through Aug. 1, and is not sure whether one of the department's two assistant sheriffs will take over his role as undersheriff.

Tanaka said his decision was not made in response to criticism in recent months

over his management of the county jails, or his involvement in a 2002 sale of department Kevlar vests to Cambodia.

Instead, he said he is retiring to spend more time with his family and to focus on the city of Gardena. He might also

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spend more time running and golfing, he said.

"I've been working two jobs since I was 15," Tanaka said. "I've done a lot in 33 years in this business. The last 12 years, I've been responsible for the budget and the war on gangs. I'm very proud of that, and that I've had an opportunity to work with so many great men and women over the years."

"I'm not putting myself out to pasture just yet. Let's just say I'm at a pit stop of life. I'm recharging."

Sheriff's Department spokesman Steve Whitmore said Tanaka informed executive staff of his decision Wednesday afternoon.

"He's just been giving it some thought, and he said to me that it's just time," Whitmore said. "He has a tremendous amount of support within this department. He's going to be sorely missed."

Tanaka joined the Sheriff's Department in 1982 as a custody

deputy before becoming a patrol deputy at the Carson station. There, he developed a high-impact community-based policing program and the Asian Crimes Task Force. He went on to direct the Gang Crimes Enforcement Program before rising up through the administrative ranks of the department.

Over the past nine years, he has managed the department's \$2.5 billion budget.

Last year, a report by the Citizens' Commission on Jail Violence found that Tanaka had improperly urged deputies to be aggressive toward inmates, and a federal investigation is under way.

This year, he was embroiled in a controversy over a 2002 shipment of department Kevlar vests to Cambodia. Tanaka assisted the transaction by connecting Gardena officials with Sheriff's Department officials to broker the sale. Critics said the transaction was suspicious because it should have been done directly between the county and Cambodia, rather than using Gardena as a middle man.

Gardena Councilwoman Rachel Johnson challenged Tanaka for mayor in Tuesday's election because of these issues.

"I didn't want the focus of the campaign to be on his professional troubles," Johnson said. But she actively criticized Tanaka during the campaign, raising questions about his ethics and his dedication.

Tanaka brushed off questions about whether he is retiring under pressure.

"They've never been able to find any evidence other than anecdotal" about inmate abuse, Tanaka said. "I don't have a concern. They can investigate me forever about anything. I try to live my life the way I was raised — follow the law, follow policy, pay taxes, and go to sleep at night with a decent mind."

He said he has no plans to run for Los Angeles County sheriff next year.

The Associated Press contributed to this report

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Thur 3-7-13 Daily Breeze

Tanaka re-elected as Gardena mayor

By Sandy Mazza
Staff Writer

Gardena Mayor Paul Tanaka thanked his supporters Wednesday for re-electing him to a third term even though he didn't campaign for the office.

Tanaka took 58.6 percent of the vote Tuesday while his main challenger, Councilwoman Rachel Johnson, received 35.6 percent. Councilman Dan Medina, who campaigned as a write-in candidate, was a distant third place.

Joining Tanaka in the victory circle Tuesday were incumbent Councilwoman Tasha Cerda and Terrance Terauchi, a former city mayor for four years.

Cerda, appointed to the council in 2009 and seeking her first full term Tuesday, was the top vote-getter with 29.9 percent. Terauchi came in second with 26.7 percent of the vote. He will replace Councilman Ron Ikejiri, who was termed out.

Third-place candidate Rodney Tanaka (who is not related to Paul Tanaka) trailed Terauchi by just 72 votes. There is a possibility the election outcome could shift after late absentee ballots are counted.

The incumbent mayor had been prepared to cede the office to Johnson this year, but when it appeared she wasn't interested, he filed for another term. Confused by

Johnson's last-minute decision to seek the city's top elective job, Tanaka said he would serve out a third term if re-elected but wouldn't campaign because of the negative attacks against him.

"I appreciate that the residents of Gardena expressed themselves the way they did despite the negative campaigning that was directed toward me," Tanaka said. "The obligation that we now have is to put our differences aside, come together as a group, and work toward the betterment of our community."

Johnson attacked Tanaka during the campaign for coming under fire in his professional life as Los Angeles County undersheriff. Tanaka was accused of festering a violent culture against jailed inmates, and of participating in an illegal shipment of Kevlar vests to Cambodia in 2002.

On Wednesday afternoon, Tanaka resigned from his high-profile job as No. 2 man in the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. He will remain in the position through Aug. 1.

In the next four years, Tanaka said he hopes to see a new community and senior center erected near the police station.

Tanaka time in office has been marked by increasing financial prosperity and cohesive politi-

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cal leadership. He vowed to continue to improve the city's financial stability and expand services. Last week, Standard & Poor's Ratings Services upgraded Gardena's credit worthiness from an A-minus to an A — a notable achievement for a city that faced bankruptcy a decade ago.

After election results were announced late Tuesday, Johnson said she was sad about the outcome, but hopeful.

"I want to congratulate Mayor Tanaka and I want to thank my family and supporters for their hard work," Johnson said. "I am looking forward to serving ... Gardena for the remainder of my term."

Johnson will remain on the council for two more years.

Cerda, an insurance agent and longtime homeowners association president, has refused to answer questions about what she hopes to do in her next term.

Terauchi, 64, served as mayor from 2001 until 2005, when

Tanaka beat him. He works as a Los Angeles County deputy district attorney, prosecuting white-collar crime and health care fraud. He promised to expand senior services and find ways to get new funding to clean environmentally contaminated properties around the city.

City Treasurer J. Ingrid Tsukiyama ran unopposed for the second time in a row since she first took office in 2005.

In the city clerk's race, Mina Semenza won Tuesday by just 53 votes over Shannon Tsukiyama. And third-place candidate Art

Kaskanian had just nine votes less than Tsukiyama.

Late absentee ballots could play a role in the final outcome of the clerk's race.

Semenza, 59, said her professional connections and years of volunteer work would serve her well as the city clerk. She is a Realtor, a city commissioner and an active community volunteer. She ran for council in 2008 but was unsuccessful.

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Fri 3-8-13 LA Times

Tanaka's welcome departure

UNDERSHERIFF Paul Tanaka, one of the most controversial figures in the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, is stepping down. That's welcome news.

Tanaka has been accused by current and retired sheriff's deputies of condoning and at times encouraging misconduct and abuse in the department. They say he created a climate that prized aggression and loyalty over good policing. A county commission looking into violence in the county jails concluded last year that Tanaka had tried to undermine the credibility of internal affairs investigators. And The Times has reported that a federal grand jury heard testimony about the undersheriff's role in allegedly hiding an informant from the FBI.

Few who have followed the upheaval in Sheriff Lee Baca's department over the last couple of years can have forgotten Tanaka's infamous statement to deputies encouraging them to work in the "gray area" — language Tanaka insists was misinterpreted and not intended to imply that jailers should break the rules or use violence against inmates.

Baca's office said Wednesday that Tan-

aka's exit was voluntary and unrelated to the criticism of his performance. Yet whether the undersheriff simply chose to retire after 30-plus years or was forced out makes no difference. What is important is that Baca, who doesn't face reelection until next year, seizes the opportunity presented by Tanaka's departure. Among other things, he should require a zero-tolerance policy toward deputies who make false statements or engage in excessive use of force, and create a separate career track for deputies who work in the jails.

Most immediately, Tanaka's departure will ensure that the authority of the recently appointed assistant sheriff for the custody division, Terri McDonald, isn't undermined by a shadow sheriff. Tanaka had a reputation for protecting jailers who broke the rules and, in some cases, threatening captains who sought to discipline deputies. The last thing McDonald needs is any additional obstacles to bringing much-needed change.

While we are glad to see Tanaka go, and take it as the first real signal from Baca that he's committed to reform, there is much that remains to be done, including fully implementing the 63 recommendations made last year by the jails commission.

Tanaka's decision to step down a surprise

[Tanaka, from A1]
Miriam Krinsky, executive director of the county commission that examined jail violence, welcomed Tanaka's departure, saying that the panel's members had been deeply troubled by his handling of the jails and felt that new management was needed.

"It was clear to us that the impact of the undersheriff on the problems we saw in the jails could not be under-

estimated," she said Wednesday.

A department spokesman said Tanaka's departure was not connected to the criticism he faced in recent months and was voluntary.

"It's time. He's been here 31 years," said Sheriff's Department spokesman Steve Whitmore. "The sheriff didn't ask him to leave. This was done by his own volition."

Tanaka declined to comment Wednesday. In the past, he has defended his management of the Sheriff's Department. During testimony before the jail abuse commission last year, Tanaka accepted some blame for problems in jails but said his role had been overblown. He said he was the target of critics with personal agendas against him.

"There are people that maybe don't get to where

they believe they should and I'm an easy target," he said.

Once mentioned as Baca's heir apparent, Tanaka saw his standing erode when the jail scandal broke in 2011. But despite calls to push him out, Baca stood by him. The sheriff portrayed Tanaka as a skilled and invaluable bureaucrat with a knack for recounting. Still, Baca reduced Tanaka's authority after the jail commission released its findings.

The undersheriff has long been a polarizing figure in the department.

As a sergeant, he was assigned in the late-1980s to the Lynwood Station, which was plagued by allegations of brutality. It was around then that he was tattooed as a member of the Vikings, an unsanctioned group of hard-charging deputies at the station. The county would later pay out \$7.5 million to settle lawsuits claiming abuse by

members of the group. When Baca ran for sheriff in 1998, Tanaka was one of several confidantes who worked on his campaign. After Baca took office, he promoted Tanaka, then a lieutenant and a certified public accountant, as a top aide.

Around the same time, Tanaka jumped into local politics. He won a seat on the Gardena City Council in 1999 and successfully ran for mayor six years later.

Helping his political career were sheriff's colleagues and subordinates who donated \$108,311 to his four Gardena election campaigns, with 43 contributing more than \$38,000 between them, according to the jail violence commission. Many of those donors were awarded highly coveted promotions, creating the perception that loyalty to Tanaka was essential to a department career.

One retired commander said in a sworn statement that Tanaka ordered him to manipulate the department's promotional scores to benefit certain candidates.

Others raised concerns about the messages that Tanaka was conveying to deputies. On several occasions, he encouraged the department's troops to work "right on the edge of the line" and in the "grey area" as one captain put it in a memo to a supervisor.

After his statements became public last year, Tanaka issued a memo to the department saying they were being misinterpreted.

"I've come to learn in recent months that the term 'grey area' can be easily misinterpreted by those that choose to do so," he wrote. "Some would like to believe that the grey area is the area between right and wrong, that it characterizes certain police misconduct as acceptable, and that the end justifies the means."

Robert Bonner, a former federal judge and head of the Drug Enforcement Administration who served as one of the commission's members, said some of Tanaka's actions helped undermine discipline in the department.

"It's probably a good thing that he's stepping down," Bonner said, "because he was the center of so much of the controversy within the Sheriff's Department."

Peter Eliasberg, legal director of the ACLU of Southern California, said the problems at the Sheriff's Department extend well beyond Tanaka and that real reforms will require changes in the department culture.

Tanaka will retire Aug. 1 but will likely remain in public office. Preliminary results from Tuesday's elections show him winning a third term as Gardena mayor.

City and county officials recently called for probes into the sale of hundreds of ballistic vests that were funneled by the Sheriff's Department to Cambodia, through Gardena, where Tanaka was a council member at the time.

Sheriff's No. 2 leader resigns

Thur 3-7-13 LA Times

Paul Tanaka had become a focus of criticism amid the U.S. probe of alleged abuse of county jail inmates.

BY JACK LEONARD
AND ROBERT FATURECHI



FRANCINE ORR Los Angeles Times

TANAKA'S DECISION

to leave was made "by his own volition," a department spokesman said.

Dogged by allegations of misconduct and mismanagement, the second-in-command at the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department announced Wednesday that he was stepping down from his position managing the law enforcement agency.

The exit of Paul Tanaka, 54, stunned people inside and outside the Sheriff's Department because he was considered Sheriff Lee Baca's right-hand man and once held wide authority over the 18,000-person department's daily operations.

But Tanaka had become a magnet for criticism amid a federal probe into allegations that sheriff's jailers abused inmates in L.A. County jails.

Last year, a blue-ribbon

commission issued a searing critique of Baca, Tanaka and others, accusing them of fostering a culture in which deputies beat and humiliated inmates, covered up misconduct and formed aggressive deputy cliques in the county jails.

Current and retired sheriff's officials publicly blamed Tanaka for some of the department's woes, saying he helped create a climate in which aggression was prized, loyalty was placed above merit and discipline discouraged. A federal grand jury investigating the jails heard testimony about the role Tanaka played in allegedly hiding an inmate informant from the FBI.

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